INTERVIEW WITH MISS KAREN BRUCKNER

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Conducted by:

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Dodson: What we are going to do on this particular tape is interview Miss Karen Bruckner, who is a student at one of the high schools in the Valley. This is the first time that we have interviewed a younger person and we are anxious to get her particular account of live in the Valley as she sees it. Miss Bruckner, I wonder if you'd give us your full name and tell us how long you've lived in the Valley and anything else that you care to tell us about yourself.

Bruckner: Ok, well,I'm seventeen years old. I've lived in the Valley for seven great years and I went to elementary school and junior high and high school in the Valley.

Dodson: Now, I wonder Karen, if you would tell us something about your current education in the Valley. The elementary school you went to, for instance and what sort of things you did there, how they taught, who your teachers were, anything you care to tell us about it.

Bruckner: Ok, I went to Hesby Elementary School and I don't remember that much about it. It's a long time for me, but the.... Their teaching techniques were going on field trips and class activities to get us involved. but they never really made us study, and that's the only thing that I had problems with through junior high and high school. They just don't make you sit down and memorize things or study. So I haven't learned that much. I don't even remember any of the history they taught me, and I don't remember any of the grammar and when I graduated junior high school I had to take classes in adding and subtracting with decimals and fractions. I graduated junior high with straight As and honors in Spanish. I could not speak a word of Spanish. Then when I got into Birmingham High, I had a lot of trouble and I had to go back and relearn some things. And still the teachers at Birmingham are poor also. They let the kids get away with murder. They schedule a test and the class says , "We don't want the

test today, and she says,"Ok!". So you know you can get away with it, so nobody bothers to study, and that's,I think,gonna be a problem.

Dodson: Yes, that certainly would be, I should think. How are you on such things as multiplication tables and all lab. Have you learned them now, do you think?

Bruckner: Well, I always wanted to go to college, so I put my mind to it myself, and learned that I can do that. I took a lot of basic math classes, so I've got it down pretty good. But the teachers don't help at all. They are just there. They assign the work and you do it if you want, and you don't if you don't want to do it.

Dodson: But what effect does this have on the class? Do you find that some students are very conscientious in doing more than they have to do to get by or does it result in generally low quality learning?

Bruckner: I found that the kids that come from a higher economic class - their parents must push them. They try hard and they want, they have,you know,careers in mind that they really want to succeed in, and the kids that come from a lower class really don't care. They just don't do anything in class,and they really don't think about the future.

Dodson: You think that lowers the general learning level in the class to have some who don't try?

Bruckner: Yeah, it makes it hard for the teacher because the ones that don't try aren't interested,and they disrupt the class and for the ones that really want to try and get education it's hard to keep stopping in the middle of a lecture that keep the class in order.

Dodson: Are there any discipline problems in the class in your opinion? Is it possible to keep good order or is it not done?

Bruckner: Well, the teachers have to do a lot of threatening,and they give a lot of Us and the kids after they get so many Us, you can't get anymore, so they just keep right on going and the

the teachers then will ignore it or send them out of the class or send them to Miss Pearl [?].

Dodson: What is a U Karen? That's a term I'm not familiar with.

Bruckner: Well, on a report card, we get three grades in each class. One is for the subject matter which would be A,B, C, D or Fail, and you get one in work habit, which would be E for excellent, an S for satisfactory, U for unsatisfactory, and the same for cooperation, and in the class, if you disrupt the class three times, then you get three Us, and that makes a U on your final report card.

Dodson: I see. What sort of action is taken with the person who is a chronic disruptor who gets more than three?

Bruckner: Oh!

Dodson: When there is a whole string of them?

Bruckner: They get sent to like study hall, or drop [...?] from the class or sent to the principal and they just keep coming back,and sometimes they settle down.

Dodson: What sort of disruptions do you get in class? What does typically occur that causes a disturbance?

Bruckner: Just people that make fun of the lecturer. They laugh or pass notes or throw papers at the teacher, and this is high school I'm talking about and it happens not only in class, but out of class. The boys run around, chasing [...?] things and throwing food. That's really incredible.

Dodson: We hear quite a bit about bussing. Do you have any bus students in your school?

Bruckner: Yeah, we do.

Dodson: What has been the effect of bringing in students from other sections of the city?

Bruckner: Well, it started when I was in junior high school. And I was really scared. Everybody was really scared of 'em. When they first came there were a lot of threats. People were passing rumors that they were knifing all over, but basically the students that were bussed down were very calm and nice and pretty easy to get along with. I think that has helped

me a lot in learning to adjust to living with black people, which I have not learned from my home. My parents are a little bit prejudiced.

Dodson: Has it made any particular difference in the way the class is conducted you think?

Bruckner: No. It makes it difficult to.... In some classes, when there's just one black person, they feel very uncomfortable, and.... but I have noticed I had one history class, and the teacher was very, very prejudiced, and he would give all the white students As for doing nothing and , as a matter of fact I got an A in that history class, and I failed every test, and the black students that really tried and wrote really good papers, you know, got like Ds. The teacher just didn't care, but that's only one teacher that I can think of.

Dodson: You haven't found that the black students were in any way a disruptive influence in the school then.

Bruckner: A little bit. They tend to hang around in gangs.

Dodson: Does this make you nervous, the gang situation?

Bruckner: Yeah, because they tend to be a little more rowdy than the white people are,and you never know what they are gonna do.

Dodson: Have any unpleasant things happened in your particular case, or to you?

Bruckner: No, not to me.

Dodson: Do you know of any in the case of anyone else?

Bruckner: No, but they have their guards up. So somebody says any negative remarks to them, they are gonna come back with an argument of a fight.

Dodson: I see. So you don't feel then as fas as the level of learning is concerned, it has been adverse.

Bruckner: No. I think it's OK.

Dodson: And you do feel that something positive is gained through your association with the people of another race.

Bruckner: Yeah, I do. A lot of people are against it, because they just don't want to be associated with them, but I think it's

important to learn to live with them now, because it's ....?

Dodson: Have you made any personal friends among the minority people bussed in?

Bruckner: Yeah, I have. The one girl that is in my history class that kept getting bad grades. She's a real nice girl. I tried to help her, but you can't talk to the teacher about it if he insists that that's what she deserves.

Dodson: Did you feel that she was then getting less than she deserved?

Bruckner: A little bit less, yes. I really think that he did not give her benefit of the doubt at all.

Dodson: Would you say that in your opinion the white instructors have shown some prejudice in general or is it just one teacher?

Bruckner: Just one, but I can really notice it in him.

Dodson: I see. At present, of course, there isn't an immediate plan for bussing high school students to South Los Angeles , but if there was, what would be your attitude toward being bussed to a school in that area?

Bruckner: I wouldn't want to be bussed forcefully. I don't think forced bussing is good. But even if it is my voluntary choice, I wouldn't go, because I wouldn't want to be one of the small numbers in that kind of a school, because I have seen from experiences and stories that they can be pretty rowdy.

Dodson: You wouldn't feel completely safe then if you were down there?

Bruckner: No, although there is, like I know, junior high there Bret Harte that has policemen surrounding it. And there's police in the halls and bathrooms but still if you take one step outside of the school and I'd be scared.

Dodson: I see. So would you say that in general you are opposed to bussing or in favor of it, or would you just want a one way situation?

Bruckner: That makes me sound bad. I mean, I'm in favor as long as they are bussed to us, or it should be in equal balance. If I was bussed to a black school, and if there was an equal amount of whites, it wouldn't be as bad, and I would, maybe,

not volunteer, but if I was forced, I wouldn't feel that bad about it.

Dodson: But you just don't want to be a minority yourself.

Bruckner: Right, right, absolutely not!

Dodson: Well, thank you very much for a very fair answer on that. Can you tell us anything about the social life that you lead in the Valley? What do you do to have a good time?

Bruckner: Well... I pretty...I... It's hard to say, because in our school everybody hangs around in groups, and I don't really belong to a group, because I don't agree with any of them.There are certain groups that come from very rich families,and their only concern is to wear the most expensive clothes to school, and the most expensive purses and just show that off, and I don't go for that. Then there is a group that is constantly into drugs, and I don't go for that either. So when they have parties, all they do is they smoke marijuana and take drugs, and I don't want to be part of that. So I basically don't , you know, I only go out on dates to a movie or whatever, but I really don't participate in the parties. And I work an awful lot which takes up a lot of time that I enjoy.

Dodson: Would you say that parties are the principal form of amusement for teenagers at the present time.

Bruckner: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Dodson: You like to go to the beach?

Bruckner: Yeah, not... I do. It's not one of my favorite things.

Dodson: What would you say would be you favorite.

Bruckner: Well, right now, I am really involved with working for a ...[?] She's running for assemblyman of the 40th district, and it's hard work, but I really enjoy it , and I'd rather do that than lay out in the sun at the beach.

Dodson: Can you tell us what sort of work you do for him?

Bruckner: Well, I walk precincts with him while he circulates petitions. I counted about the Democrats and Republicans in Van Nuys, so he knows which way to concentrate his efforts. I mail letters, I answer the phones. I just do any general stuff that he has

to do. I can do almost anything for him, and I'm there almost everyday, aside from my other job that I work at Bullocks.

Dodson: So you really find that more rewarding than going to a party or lying on the beach.

Bruckner: It sounds that, but, because I workwith him personally it's very rewarding, because he is a very nice man, extremely nice, and I got a lot of satisfaction out of it.

Dodson: You would like to dance?

Bruckner: That's another thing, yes. I do not really like to dance and the older group of teenagers, like college age, hang out at the bars and go dancing all night, and I don't really do that either.

Dodson: Now, here in the Los Angeles area, we are especially blessed with having places like the Music Center. Do you like the sort of shows they put on there?

Bruckner: I haven't been to any. No, I can't say.

Dodson: I see, well can you think of anything else you like to do that I haven't asked about at all?

Bruckner: Well, a big thing now is concerts. Concerts.... I would like to go, but I don't like all the disorder. There is so much drugs and people fighting and it's so expensive just to see a musician sing that it's not worth it to me.

Dodson: Now you mentioned that you spend a considerable amount of your time on your job. What sort of job do you have?

Bruckner: I work at Bullocks Department Store in the men's department, and I sell clothes. I was on the campus board there two years ago, which consisted of modeling and informal modeling around the store , community services like making Easter projects for the children, hospitals, and stuff like that.

Dodson: I see. You worked for Bullocks for several years then.

Bruckner: Three years.

Dodson: What other sorts of jobs jave you held?

Bruckner: The only other job that I had was working for my father, because right now, it's really hard. You can't find a job unless you

are eighteen,and I'm seventeen. So the only way I can make money was to work with my father,and he is a printer, so I would be collating and stapling.

Dodson: I see. What sort of working hours do you have?

Bruckner: I work every Monday night, Thursday night, Friday night, from six to nine-forty, and I work every Saturday from nine-thirty to six fifteen and every Sunday from twelve to five, which is a lot.

Dodson: And I would have asked you whether this interfered with your studies at school, but from what you've told me that your parents aren't very strict on that.

Bruckner: Yeah, because school... I got ten credits, which is worth two classes, just for working at Bullocks. It's called work experience, and my manager wrote up a little resume and he gave me an A. So instead of taking two classes, I got an A just for working. So right now, I'm only taking two classes at school, because I don't feel that our school's worth going to.

Dodson: What two classes are you taking, by the way?

Bruckner: I'm taking United States Government and Psychology.

Dodson: I see. What sort of religious life do you have?

Bruckner: Well, I think nowadays religion isn't emphasized that much. In my family, I was never... I... They took me to Sunday school and I cried and kicked the whole time, and that was it for me. My brother was Barmitzvahed,and I do attend temple on high holidays,and we have our Passover which I go to, but...[?] In school, in elementary school, junior high, or high school, I have not learned... they haven't taught us anything. There is one class in high school called comparative religion, and they compare the different religions and all the Indians and their beliefs and like that, but I never took it.

Dodson: How do you feel about your own religion? Do you feel that you really understand it, or that your religious education has been neglected?

Bruckner: It has... I don't really understand it, and that sounds even worse, but when I go to Passover every time I pick up something different about religion. Every once in a while I go to a book and look it up, but I just forget what I read because of my education. I just read and don't comprehend too much.

Dodson: I see. Do you feel that this is true in general of the people your age, that they are not very religious as you think over your classmates and the friends that you have?

Bruckner: Yeah, they consider it a waste of time. The high holidays and most of the people, like in the Jewish religion, you get holidays off the school, you don't have to go to school. So a lot of the kids will, you know, just do it without reason. They do not even know why they're staying away from school.

Dodson: Sometimes I think that's a little true of holidays like Washington's Birthday and Lincoln's Birthday. Most of the people just stay home.

Bruckner: Yes, absolutely. They don't realize what it is. I think they should be made to study that and know what they are doing, but I never was.

Dodson: I see. It may interest you to know that I taught the course in comparative religion here at the college.

Bruckner: Yeah!

Dodson: Tell us about your vocational aims. As you went through school what sort of career did you look forward to or how're you looking forward to, I'd better say, now.

Bruckner: Well, I was very... I had absolutely no idea. Up until tenth grade and I decided that I was just gonna be an interior decorator. That's what I wanted to be, and that lasted about two months, and now I decided that I would like to become a couselor, an abortion couselor, because I get along with people really well, and I can really symphasize, emphasize with people, and it makes me feel good to help somebody, 'cause right now all my friends are coming to me for help and I talk to them and they always feel better about it, and I really like it.

Dodson: Well, now that's very interesting. So that brings up a question of how you feel on such subjects as abortion, and how you think your friends feel about it. You favor this, or are you opposed? Well, I assume you must favor it.

Bruckner: Well, being a couselor that is not my right to say. What I would do is tell them exactly what it is they're gonna be going through, what their choices are,and what is best for them. Personally I am in favor of abortion. I think that is O.K. under certain circumstances, under most circumstances, because I have taken a child developement class in school that I really, really liked, and I've learned that children from an unhappy home or unwanted children just grow up and they have so many problems. They are getting into trouble, and bring somebody into the world that you don't want is just making trouble for somebody else. So...

Dodson: You would favor abortion then in any case where the child is unwanted for whatever reason.

Bruckner: Yes, I do. It will last,I mean after the woman has been pregnant a certain amount of month that's really bad to me that I still would have to be in favor of it.

Dodson: Then how do you feel on contraception?

Bruckner: I think it's important that before people get into it they should know what they're getting into. They should not just go and pick up the pill and start taking it, because they have to be aware of the side effects and what can happen to you, but I think that's important because a lot of people right now are getting involved and messing around and getting into trouble because they don't really know what they are doing. They are just doing it to be in, and that is a big problem. I know a lot of my friends have had abortions, and what are they? 17, 16 and that's pretty bad. I believe.

Dodson: I am rather surprised to hear you say that a lot of your friends have had on the high school level.

Bruckner: It's common, it's common.

Dodson: Is that right? I...

Bruckner: I should not say a lot of the high school level kids, because I don't hang around with people from high school. My tendency is to be with older people in college, but I know that a lot is not that uncommon as I used to think it was, but in the past couple of years I've been seeing it so much and some, like a couple of people I know, had more than one and more than two.

Bruckner: What is your attitude toward them? Do you find yourself blaming them a little bit or are you sympathetic toward them?

Bruckner: No, sympathetic. I feel sorry for them. I try to help them. I tell them, "I'll take you somewhere to get you protection", because I don't want it happen to them again, but they are being stupid about it, and they are just really naive.

Dodson: Well, this takes us into the general subject of morality among teenagers. Would you say that the standards of morality, if we can use that expression at all, are more relaxed than they had been in the past?

Bruckner: Yes.

Dodson: Or how did they change? Have they changed?

Bruckner: I don't know how they changed, but I could tell you that things are pretty weird right now. People just do things to be liked. They don't care who they are with or what time it is. They just go ahead and do it to... It's sort of a reputation that isn't bad as it used to be. Going to bed with somebody isn't... They...It's not considered a bad reputation anymore, not as much to some people. You know to some people it's their whole life.

Dodson: Do you know of cases where any of your classmates are living with people that they are not married to or does that occur at all on the high school level?

Bruckner: Well, not in high school, but I do have one friend that is in twelfth grade, married and eight months pregnant, and she's still going to school, which is something she's very brave for, and... But I know a lot of my friends college age , like 19 or

20 are living with people, and I am all in favor of that as long as they are serious.

Dodson: Can you tell us just why you are in favor?

Bruckner: Well, because you don't know somebody until you live with him, and I think if you're really, really are serious about getting married and not fooling youself, but if you really are serious about it and you should live with a person and see if you'll be able to get along, because I know some of my friends that were very serious about getting married and lived with a person and found it's not as easy or as good as they thought it would be.[You know ?] it takes a lot of thinking and working out, and you have to know if you can do that. You both have to [be ?] willing to give.

Dodosn: I see. Can you tell us anything about the use of narcotics at the present time? Now when we go back 50 years, none of the oldtimers can ever remember anything about this at all. Would you say it's rather common now?

Bruckner: Yeah, around certain groups it is that people... They just really don't care about school. They smoke dope before they go into school or they take what is really going around now is called [...?] and they take that as a muscle relaxer and they take it before school so, you know, you just sit in class anyway's not much goes on and why, you know, they like to be in another world.

Dodson: How is the reaction in class after they have taken this? What effect does it seem to have ?

Bruckner: They just sit there and stare at the walls. Either that or it depends what they have taken, or they can't sit still they are fidgeting, throwing pens, laughing, just doing mad things.

Bruckner: Are the teachers conscious that they are under the influence of a narcotic?

dodson: Once in a while.I have a friend, yeah, the teacher turned them in, because sometimes they take so much that there is no way of hiding it, and so they call the police ...[?].

Dodson: I gather, this you are very much opposed to. Is that right?

Bruckner: Yeah, it's... They are just wasting their time going to school. I mean, if they have to do it, they should at least not do it at school. I mean you are in school to learn, even though it's hard nowadays, but you should be able to try and pick up as much as you can in class, and they are just wasting their lives, and it's all those guys I see they are doing it, and what are they gonna do when they graduate high school? They have nothing.

Dodson: Now, one thing that has impressed me, as I have been interviewing older people is, that they will always tell me, that when they were in their teens, they felt perfectly safe going anywhere, taking a walk at night if they wanted to and so on. What would you say the present situation is on that? How do you feel about those things?

Bruckner: Oh, it scares me to death. I don't walk the streets by myself at all. In my neighborhood I... We live up in the hills, and it's a pretty nice area, and I don't even like that, because people drive by, and they just really are really weird people nowadays. You walk on the street/ You walk on the streets and they honk and yell and chase after you, and just that really scares me, I mean, and I went down to San Diego recently and it's different there. It's a college town, and I felt a lot safer there than I do in Van Nuys.

Dodson: Well, I'm unable to express an opinion on that since I've never lived in San Diego.

Dodson: Have you ever tried hitchhiking?

BRuckner: Yeah, I did when I was fourteen with...of course, you know, I was under a lot of peer pressure and at that time I would have a pretty weak personality, and I was very easily influenced and, yeah, I tried that a couple of times, but as I grew up peer pressure just does not bother me any more. I am a much stronger person, and I am more of an individual, and ... if I don't want to take drugs, I don't, and I don't care what people think about me. If I don't want to hitchhike I don't, and they don't like it, then, that's not my type of person.

Dodson: Did you have any unfortunate incidents happen when you did hitchhike?

Bruckner: No, ah ah , nice people picked us up the couple of times we did it.

Dodson: But at the present time, you would not do that.

Bruckner: No, ah ah. I was so naive then. No, I'm really scared now.

Dodson: So you would figure that would be a definitely unsafe thing to do.

Bruckner: Right, I wouldn't even sit at the busstop. I won't.

Dodson: Well, this is very interesting as getting a picture of the Valley now as it seems to you.

Bruckner: I... I just have more of a paranoied attitude than most people got, 'cause I am really paranoied.

Dodson: Have any of your friends, to your knowledge, had any unfortunate occurences as the result of hitchhiking.

Bruckner: Yes, yes, I had one friend that I grew up with in elementary school and junior high, and in tenth grade, she was hitchhiking down to Laguna, and she was raped and stabbed to death.

Dodson: Oh, my!

Bruckner: And she was only seventeen or sixteen, and she was a friend of mine, and I know a couple of other girls that were hitchhiking. They were stabbed but, you know, fortunately they lived, but they still had that experience, and I know that because of drugs, one of my friends was killed. She was driving and she went over the cliff, and another girl was in an accident. She was on drugs also. But bad things. A lot of my friends, it's really hard to believe, you know, we are only seventeen, and then some of my friends had been injured in hospitals or killed or something.

Dodson: I see. Well, can you tell us anything about fads that have existed in the Valley among teenagers?

Bruckner: Well, in high school and junior high, the big thing was to be a surfer what they call, and to be that you have to wear Levis corduroys, ...[?] and T shirts and just hand loose, you know

and everybody walks around with their yoyos and skateboards and everybody has their own magazines with all the surfers in it, and hang out at the beach, and all that kind of stuff.

Dodson: And now, did you do that yourself ?

Bruckner: Well, a little bit, yeah. I've started to do it like... I just thought this is ridiciolous , I don't want to do this. It was really bad and ... But one thing that I've noticed now, is now,that was three years ago. I've seen some of the kids that are in eights or ninth grade and instead of that, they are into what the high school kids are doing and that's like a fashion show, dressing up for school in very expensive clothes, and I'm sure there is still that little surfer group, and that it's really changed.

Dodson: Can you think of any other fads that have been in existence since you've been here?

Bruckner: Oh yeah. There was one that's called pantsing somebody. All the boys would run around and pull the girls pants down as hard as they could. ...[?]

Dodson: Did that ever happen to you ?

Bruckner: Oh, they tried. I would wear a belt.

Dodson: What effect would that have on the girl when it happened to her ?

Bruckner: Oh, they just scream, you know, like ...[?] That's what they wanted attention. That's why they did it, and they'd get all embarassed, but what can you do.

Dodson: So they sort of took it in stride then.

Bruckner: Yeah, yeah, no, the more you don't pay attention to it the more they'll don't stop doing it , but after they'll stop doing it.

Dodson: Did that last very long as a craze?

Bruckner: No, I don't think so. The big thing is...at our school ... I think in most junior highs we have what is called the nineth grade lawn, and to walk on this - it's in the middle of the school, and it's the biggest lawn that everybody eats lunch on - to be able to walk on the lawn or eat on the lawn you have to be in ninth grade. The people that walk on the lawn that are

not in ninth grade and get caught are thrown in the trash can. That I think is still going on, and that is... It has caused a lot of fight too. People get in fights, because it's hard to walk around the lawn when you're trying to get to class because you are scared of being dumped in the trash can.

Dodson: Did you ever get dumped Karen ?

Bruckner: Yes, once. I only ran on the lawn, but they wanted to do it anyway, and I ended up in the trash can. It's not fun.

Dodson: In other words you did not enjoy it at all.

Bruckner: No, I didn't. No, but I found that after going to two years, when I was in ninth grade, I was all for those rights. If anybody set foot on that lawn I'd yell a lot.
I had to go through it.

Dodson: I see, so it was your turn to dish it out instead of taking it.

Bruckner: Yes, yes.

Dodson: Well, can you tell us a little bit about fashions ?

Bruckner: Well, as I said... The people when I was in ninth grade... Their thing was to wear cords and tee shirts, and going into tenth grade it changed a little bit, but that was still around. Now, each year it progressively gets dressier and the people are more concerned with what they look like to an extent that's absolutely ridiculous.